

RESPONSIBLE CARE - CONSCIENTIOUS CONDUCT IN CHEMICAL TRADE AND DISTRIBUTION

- **What does „Responsible Care“ mean ?**
- **Which fundamental targets are being pursued and how ?**
- **How is compliance with the program controlled ?**
- **How and when are reports made to the public ?**

At the end of 1996, the chemical trading companies which make up the German Chemical Traders Association (Verband Chemiehandel, VCH) took the decision to participate in the worldwide Responsible Care Initiative of the chemical industry¹. They have highlighted the name of the initiative and the corresponding VCH program with the addendum "Conscientious conduct in chemical trade and distribution".

What does „Responsible Care“ mean?

The Responsible Care Initiative stands for the desire, independently of legal obligations, to strive to achieve constant improvements in the fields of the environment, health and safety and to present this progress regularly to the public. This occurs in accordance with legal requirements, the traditional duties of a prudent businessman and in the interests of a future-oriented sustainable development. **In detail this means:**

- **Product stewardship:** This has been accurately paraphrased with the saying:

"from the cradle to the grave". The chemical trader takes on extended, shared responsibility for his products, not least in view of the upstream manufacturing. He ensures that the products are manufactured according to worldwide recognized safety and/or environmental protection standards. If such influencing is impossible, then the chemical trader prefers such products which comply with the applicable standards. The chemical trader only offers such products which can be safely transported, used and disposed of according to best current knowledge. For the user of his products, he is a consultation partner - also long after the goods have been delivered. He collaborates in finding solutions to disposal and/or recycling problems. He informs the manufacturer of any specific findings and thus completes the chain of information from first development right through to the final destination.

¹ The sponsor of the worldwide initiative is the International Council of Chemical Associations (ICCA). The decision to participate was implemented with a partnership agreement between the VCH and the European Chemical Industry Association (CEFIC) and the German Chemical Industry Association (VCI). The program of the VCH is based on the Responsible Care/Responsible Distribution Program of the International Council of Chemical Trade Associations ICCTA.

The responsibility for the safe handling of chemicals is not only an important element of the RC program in the chemical industry and in chemical trading, but also for all downstream users in the distribution chain. The EU has included this element as a legal obligation in the 2007 REACH Directive. An expression of product responsibility is also the commitment of the sector with regard to misuse of its products for illegal purposes, e.g. as base materials for illicit drugs or explosives.

- **Plant safety:** Systematically and comprehensively, the chemical trader addresses all aspects concerning the safe handling of his goods, in particular in his warehouses and refilling plants. He collects all available product-related information and enters these in the safety data sheets. On the basis of this substance information, he develops emergency plans and, after coordinating these with the expert authorities, he publishes them internally; if required, the general public will also be informed. The chemical trader continuously reviews his experiences and findings, exchanging information with comparable operations as well as with his suppliers, regular customer and also the authorities.

- **Working safety and health protection:** Accident prevention and precautionary health protection for the employees is ensured by a comprehensive work safety concept which incorporates work organization and safety technology. Exposures to hazardous substances are eliminated (e.g. by using closed systems) or – if that is not possible – by limiting exposure to values which are not detrimental to health and which are constantly monitored, whereby their further reduction is a subject of constant endeavor.

- **Environmental protection:** The statutory requirements placed on the companies for the protection of water, soil and air, as well as for resource conservation, are proactively fulfilled, thus ensuring modern recycling

management. Any remaining scope for development, particularly in the recycling field, is innovatively explored and exploited for the benefit of a holistic environmental protection.

- **Transport safety:** The risks during the loading, unloading, transhipment and transport of chemicals are constantly being reevaluated. They are dominated by a strict adherence to the regulations, which however does not exclude improvements through own initiatives. The training and further education of all concerned are always promoted and sponsored.

- **Dialogue - Information of the general public:** Trust is to be created through an open and critical dialogue between chemical trading and their employees, on the one hand, and customers, consumers, neighbors and society as a whole, on the other hand. Within the scope of this process, understanding for the activities and function of chemical trading is to be promoted.

Which fundamental goals are being pursued?

The Conference on Environment and Development carried out by the UN Environment Program (UNEP), 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, created the first **model of a „sustainable development“** and characterized this as a joint target of the community of nations. The worldwide Responsible Care Initiative of the chemical industry and also the chemical trading industry is an expression of obligation to abide by this model. With its program of responsible action in chemical trading, the chemical trading industry wishes to add its own contribution: because it agrees with the findings of the UNEP, that environmental and development problems are frequently of a global nature, and that problem solutions require **responsible actions from all concerned**. Therefore, at an early date, the sector has already committed itself to show support for

the idea of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) wherever it is concerned.

How are the goals pursued ?

At the commencement of participation in the RC program, a chemical trading company signs a corresponding declaration and appoints a Responsible Care Representative who, from then on, supervises the adherence to the basic rules of the program in all parts of the company. He/she is the contact person in the company for safety, health and environmental protection concerns. He/she is in regular contact with senior management regarding these matters and participates in the internal RC workshops of the VCH.

By participating in the program, senior management commits itself to implement the „Guidelines of chemical trading for the safe handling and marketing of chemicals and the provision of information to the public“². They are de facto the precursors of the RC-program.

Furthermore, the participants undertake the obligation:

- to regularly monitor their activities to ascertain if they comply with the principle of continuous improvement of environmental protection inside the company;
- to ensure that their activities involve no unacceptably high risks for employees, external firms, customers, the public or the environment;
- to create awareness among their employees for public concerns;
- to wholeheartedly engage in an open dialogue with the public according to individual possibilities;
- to advise customers in a suitable manner about environmental aspects in connection with the handling, use and final storage of the products;
- to endeavor to ensure that contract partners working on the company premises

adhere to the same safety standards as the company itself;

- according to the available possibilities, to set up and maintain an organization for emergency measures;
- to guarantee through training courses that the employees themselves are aware of their duties, and support responsible activities in the sense of the program;
- to document that the obligations which have been made with regard to the protection of health, safety and the environment are understood as a part of the business strategy;
- to audit the process of continuous improvement by independent external experts.

At the beginning of the participation, together with an independent third party expert, authorized by the VCH, the concordance of the participation declaration with the goals set out in the program is examined. If there are deficits, the company is given the opportunity to rectify these. After a positive examination, the participant is granted the right to use the Responsible Care logo. This logo shows that the company is a member of the worldwide RC initiative and has undertaken the obligation to adhere to the rules of the initiative.

How is compliance with the program controlled?

The responsible care representative agrees with the senior management of his/her company on a working plan as a main feature of the program. In this plan, the measures which are to be taken by the company to exploit improvement potentials are set out in detail. After three years, an independ-

² 1995, decided by the members meeting of the VCH (Chemical Trade Association); the Guidelines can be viewed on the internet or a printed version can be obtained from your chemical trader or from the VCH.

ent expert third party inspects the company to see whether the self-imposed targets in the three year plan have been achieved. In this work, the expert takes the annual reports into account for continuing or, if necessary, correcting the three year plan. After a positive inspection, the company is issued with a certificate to confirm the compliance of the company activities with the regulations of the RC program. Negative inspection results can lead to the cancellation of the participation in the program. These mechanisms guarantee that only those enterprises can permanently participate in the program, and use the corresponding logo, which have integrated the ethical principles of the program into their management system. Further detailed information is contained in the „VCH-Konzept“³, including the basic requirement qualifications for an independent “expert third party”, and details on the verification of RC activities within the scope of the responsible care on-site audit.

How and when is information made public?

The participants report their activities annually to the VCH. For this purpose, quantifiable – „Indices of Performance“ – have been developed which permit a summary assessment. The VCH annual report is regularly presented to the public, and also in particular to the suppliers and customers, the neighbors of the enterprises and the responsible authorities. All previous annual reports, the “indices of performance”, the complete RC program and further information can be obtained from the VCH website³ or requested from the VCH office.

³ www.vch-online.de → “Responsible Care”



Your chemical trader and the industry association would be pleased to learn that you too are seeing a dialogue and support the responsible care activities of the chemical trading industry.



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